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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ODIP](#) [CASC](#) [OFDP](#) [PHUM](#) [AMGT](#) [CMGT](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: CHARGE DELIVERS RESPONSE ON STAFF CUTS TO MFA

REF: A. STATE 30036
[1](#)B. GEE-MOORE 3/22/08 EMAIL
[1](#)C. MINSK 163
[1](#)D. MINSK 199 (AND PREVIOUS)
[1](#)E. MINSK 204 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: DCM Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

Charge Delivers Official Response to Staff Cut Demands

[1](#)1. (C) Charge delivered ref A points and the ref B list of 17 U.S. diplomatic staff to remain in Belarus to MFA A/S-equivalent Americas Department Director Amb. Vadim Lazerko March 24. Charge noted that the USG's decision to accede to Belarusian demands to cut staff was made reluctantly and he reiterated that the demands themselves were inconsistent with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (VCDR). Charge added that this step had been taken because the USG believed it was important for the U.S. to retain a diplomatic presence in Belarus and for Belarus to maintain such a presence in the U.S.; he said that the U.S. would welcome the return of Belarusian Ambassador Khvostov to Washington and of the U.S. Ambassador to Minsk. Briefly raising the sensational anti-American coverage of the Embassy on state television March 23 (septel), Charge told Lazerko that diplomatic dialogue was the best means to convey messages of GOB concern.

MFA Rep Rejects U.S. VCDR Protests, Asks About Visas

[1](#)2. (C) Lazerko disputed the U.S. contention that Belarus' request to cut diplomatic staff was in contravention of the VCDR and stated that the reasons Belarus had taken such a step (U.S. sanctions on the Belarusian petrochemical conglomerate Belneftekhim; ref C) were well known to the American side. Lazerko promised to convey the list further within the GOB.

[1](#)3. (C) Lazerko inquired if it was true that the U.S. Embassy would resume visa processing March 25. Charge replied that the Embassy was prepared to process emergency visas at this time, and a return to regular visa processing would hopefully take place this week or next week. Charge added that the primary reason for the temporary suspension of visa processing was to permit embassy staff to prepare to depart Belarus in response to MFA demands.

Charge Restates Protest of Lack of Consular Access to AMCIT

¶4. (C) As the meeting was concluding, Charge repeated once again his strong protests over lack of consular access to Emanuel Zeltser, an AMCIIT held in BKGB detention for 12 days without seeing an American consul (refs D, E). Charge noted that he had met with both the Head of the MFA's Consular Department Giro and his deputy, but that consular access to Zeltser still had not been facilitated. Lazerko promised to raise this point once again with MFA leadership.

Comment

¶5. (C) Lazerko accepted the news that the USG had agreed to reduce the number of diplomats serving in Minsk without particular comment or enthusiasm. He gave no indication, however, if this would conclude Belarus' response to U.S. sanctions, or if more steps were coming. In no sense a decision maker, it is entirely likely that Lazerko is not even privy to such information.

MOORE